

We are going to see that our veterans are cared for. I realize that offsets are needed. I do not think we should have taken this one. But for our State, we are going to receive tremendous benefits in Missouri. This is nearly a 53-percent increase in the annual funding for the State of Missouri where our roads, highways and bridges are not just a matter of convenience, they are a matter of life and death. Safety depends upon adequate roads.

For the first time, we are going to see our share of the funds moving up from the low 80 cents per \$1 sent in to almost 92 cents. We will see a structure to ensure the gas taxes will be used for highways and transportation. The flexibility is expanded and for good measure.

I thank the leaders for agreeing to my wetlands banking amendment which will enable us to ensure improved protection for wetlands in accommodating the highway construction.

Last year, I worked with people on both sides to put through the Bond extension which kept the highway funding flowing until May 1 of this year. We have not had contract authority, obligation authority for the last month. I believe the President, through his Secretary of Transportation, expressed great appreciation for this measure, and I hope that we can pass it today and get it signed by the President so we can go back to rebuilding the roads, bridges and highways that are vitally important for our country.

I thank the leader and thank the leadership of the committee.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST— CONFERENCE REPORT TO AC- COMPANY H.R. 2400

Mr. LOTT. Mr. President, I renew my unanimous consent request that the Senate proceed to the ISTE A conference report, notwithstanding the receipt of the papers, and that the reading be considered dispensed with.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mr. KERRY. I object at this point.

Mr. LOTT. I thought this was going to be resolved.

Mr. KERRY. We are just in conversation now, Mr. President. If we can just have time so we can complete the conversation.

Mr. LOTT. Mr. President, I intend to renew this request about every 2 minutes for the remainder of the day, and as soon as we get this consent, I suggest we go to a recorded vote, because there are major problems being caused by this delay and they are only going to grow. In that Senators want to express their interest, concern, appreciation or hatred, they will be able to do so at great length.

I hope we can get something done here so we can move to this unanimous consent request and then move to a vote. Senator DASCHLE is in concert with me on this. It is the right thing

for us to do for each other and for our country.

I will withhold momentarily, but I am going to renew this request in just a few minutes.

Mr. WARNER addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Virginia.

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Mr. WARNER. I thank the Presiding Officer.

Mr. President, while both leaders are present on the floor, as one who has been involved for a year and a half in preparing the legislation which now, hopefully, will be voted upon by the Senate, I thank my distinguished colleague, the majority leader, and my colleague, the distinguished minority leader. I just think of how many times during the course of this conference we have made calls to them to seek their guidance that both are entrusted to give as a consequence of their very important positions.

I also have virtually over the last 7 days and nights worked at the side of my distinguished chairman, Senator CHAFEE, and the distinguished ranking member, the Senator from Montana, Mr. BAUCUS, as we prepared and then I think very fairly, forcefully and successfully advocated the Senate's position before the House of Representatives.

The House was very ably represented by Chairman SHUSTER, ranking member Congressman OBERSTAR, Congressman PETRI, Congressman RAHALL—the four from the House versus the three from the Senate.

It was a long conference. Not until late last night did we put in place the final decision for the foundation on which I believe this bill rests, and that is equity among the States. Fifteen months ago, as chairman of the subcommittee in the Environment Committee entrusted with this important legislation, we embarked on the hearing process for this legislation. We held hearings in seven different States because it was essential to go out and get the views of the people: The citizens, the supervisors, the State legislatures and, indeed, the representatives of their legislatures and the Governors themselves. Senator BAUCUS and I actually went to a joint hearing of the States of Montana and Idaho. Senator CHAFEE held hearings in other parts of America. So we didn't just sit in Washington, we went to where the problems are and to learn firsthand.

Senator BAUCUS has been an absolute brick, as we say throughout my part of the world, as my partner, together with Senator CHAFEE, not only in the final hours, but throughout the 15-month process to bring this bill to fruition.

The dollar value represents the largest increase in the history of America. Many people played a vital role in that, notably the senior Senator from West Virginia, the senior Senator from Texas, Senator DOMENICI and, indeed,

Senator STEVENS was very helpful, because this is a very complex series of votes and then adjustments to the various accounting principles and budget principles which we adhered to in the Senate.

So many persons are deserving of a great deal of credit for providing this important conference report which will shortly be voted on by this body.

The staff is extraordinary. In my 19 years in the Senate, I do not know of another instance in which I have seen more dedicated service. By my side here in the Chamber is Ann Loomis, who was the counsel for the subcommittee, who 15 months ago worked and traveled, as did I and others, to gain the very important information from across the United States to incorporate into this bill. Kathy Ruffalo of Montana was Senator BAUCUS' principal assistant on the committee. She also worked with us throughout this bill, as did Ellen Stein of my staff. Jimmie Powell, of course, is the staff director. Dan Corbett, Tom Sliter—and all too often we forget the many others who are back in the offices of the Senators, who represent those Senators on the committee in the long hearings and the workup of this legislation, and, most particularly, the support staff who are on the Environment and Public Works Committee—all contributed to making this, I think, the most significant bill in the history of the United States of America addressing transportation needs.

How often has Senator GRAMM or Senator BYRD pointed out that we are in a one-world market. To the extent that we in the United States can have an efficient and safe transportation system is to the extent we can compete with nations far beyond our shores.

Our system was aging, continues to age; and this bill makes the necessary corrections. And through the leadership of Senator BYRD and Senator GRAMM, we got the additional funds to make it the most meaningful transportation bill in America's history.

Equity was the theme, the very theme that united all of us. While we incorporated many of the principles of ISTE A, the bill passed in 1991—and it was important to do so—there were corrections that, I can say, as softly, I suppose, as it can be expressed, were very definitely needed to correct what we felt were inequities in ISTE A.

Mr. President, I see the distinguished leader. I will be happy to yield.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST— CONFERENCE REPORT TO AC- COMPANY H.R. 2400

Mr. LOTT. I renew my request that the Senate now proceed to the ISTE A conference report notwithstanding the receipt of the papers, and the reading be considered as dispensed with.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mr. WYDEN addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oregon.